Northside Seed Grant

“Because I Live Here”:
Negotiating Selves through Storytelling

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Abstract

This paper reports on a three-month study of bi-weekly storytelling sessions with African American 3rd graders in an urban school, and seeks to develop an understanding of how the cultural storytelling promoted particular identities and ways of being as well as how students took up or resisted those identities. Elements of performance theory, with its focus on the "decontextualization" and "recontextualization" of texts (Bauman & Briggs, 1990), and critical discourse analysis, as it relates to identities and social power (Gee, 2005), frame the analysis of how three students "story" themselves through retellings of and responses to the tales they hear. These cases demonstrate how social identities were in constant negotiation in the storytelling space in ways that were awarded varying degrees of what Bauman and Briggs refer to as access, legitimacy, competence, and value.

Introduction

The idea for this storytelling project was a collaborative one. Nothando and Vusi Zulu, master storytellers and co-researchers on this project, came to the College of Education with the idea that they wanted to partner with the university to better understand the influence that their storytelling sessions have on the students who participate in them. With a team of researchers in place, we had our first meeting in August. At this meeting, Nothando explained that she knew that her storytelling "works," but needed the university to help articulate the ways in which it did this. When asked to describe what she meant by "works," Nothando explained that students could articulate their responses to the lesson or moral of her stories, that she felt storytelling could improve reading comprehension, and that she sees "visible signs of cognition" as students create images of the stories in their minds.

Nothando's understanding of what happens during her storytelling sessions is not far removed from what some research suggests. Scholars, for example, focus on the affects of storytelling on students' language and skill development (Honeygram, 2000; Strickland & Morrow, 1989), motivation in content areas (Groce, 2004), and cognitive development (Roney, 1996). Yet, it was not until we asked Nothando *why* she tells her stories that her face lit up and her voice acquired the melodic tone that I came to associate with her most powerful moments of storytelling. Here, Nothando explained that storytelling creates an intimacy among those who hear her stories. That she likes to "get down to the level" of her listeners and to be near them. She explained that each response to her stories was connected not by an 'or,' but by an 'and' that brings each member of the audience into the storytelling family. There is "freedom," she explained, in the telling and hearing of stories that she feels dissolves fear and opens a way for each student to find success. Vusi, a storyteller himself, added that he believes that when students hear his wife's stories, they are "less likely to go out and shoot someone." And finally, Nothando shared that when asked by the principal of the school where our research was to take place "Why do you want to do here?" she replied, "Because I live here."

It is this second answer that has become of the focus of this research and lends itself to the title. Nothando and Vusi's responses here demonstrate that their storytelling is about more than building skills and motivating learning, although these, too, matter to them a great deal. Yet, in our first meeting and in repeated conversations, they spoke about the power of stories to build community and change possible futures for students. For this reason, the study explores how cultural storytelling promotes particular identities and ways of being in the world (Gee, 2001), and how students take up or resist those identities and ways in the storytelling space. In addition,

it seeks to understand how the students "story" possible selves through their retellings and responses to the stories they hear.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A number of scholars have written about the relationship between storytelling and identity, although most of this work centers on personal narrative, or stories told about personal experience. Ochs and Capps (2001) contend that personal narrative is a means for understanding and ordering experience and projecting selves into storied futures, and Labov (1967) is well known for his analyses of how personal narratives offer a speaker's evaluative stance. Others focus on how stories do the work of socializing children into the shared beliefs and values of a particular culture by valuing certain stories over others (Cassell & Ryokai, 2001; Zipes, 1995), which builds on studies by Heath (1983) and Scollon and Scollon (1981) which demonstrate that young children from a variety of backgrounds are exposed to and participate in personal storytelling from a young age. Others still give attention to contextual factors and the social positions among speakers as stories get told (Wortham, 2000).

For the present purpose, I draw on work which explores how stories are embedded in the contexts in which they are used, as do some of the studies above, and I turn to sociocultural literacy research, in particular, performance theory, to frame an analysis of the students' and the teacher's storytelling practices. Performance theory addresses how speakers take up positions in relation to expectations of others and social Discourses available within a context (Davies & Harre, 1990). In this sense, the interpretation of the story cannot have meaning outside the context of the dynamic relations among the storyteller, the students, the researchers, and the available social and institutional Discourses of school and community.

Performance theory applied to storytelling encourages a view of story as a text emerging within the context of the event (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). In this case, the story is not a *thing* but an evolving practice informed and negotiated among participants. Storytelling, in this way, is an act of identity making which is in constant negotiation (Holland & Lave, 2003). Thus, participants perform the self through storytelling acts, but always in relation to the group. Moreover, these performances of self, as Lewis (2001) writes, are "defined through repeated performances (ways of talking, listening, writing, using one's body)" (p. x). In this way, performances of the self in the storytelling space are multiple and dynamic. Miller and colleagues (1993), for example, argue that the identities that stories engender are always context specific and take place in relation to other people in the storytelling present. They examine retellings of stories in which children appropriate stories for their own purposes and argue that any story has the potential to be "personalized" (p. 91). Hull and Katz (2006), in their work on digital storytelling, write that "stories recur and change depending on who is listening . . . how we represent ourselves in storied worlds depends on who we are trying to be in relation to others" (p. 45). Storied practices are always dynamic and the identities performed through them, or in opposition to them, multiple.

As the analysis below will demonstrate, because performances of the self are always relational and negotiated, they are often defined by resistance and struggle. Conquergood (1989) writes, "Because it is public, performance is a site of struggle where competing interests intersect, and different viewpoints and voices get articulated" (p. 84). Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of voice is useful in thinking through such struggle. Bakhtin (1981) argues that words are always half someone else's, and as such, any "authoring of the self" through language is always an answering back and answering forward to other addressees. Voice, then, is socially shaped,

heteroglossic, and often in conflict. Authorship or identity, thus, is the orchestration of multiple and dialogic voices (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).

Performance theory and the work of Bakhtin make sense as theoretical frames not because storytelling is an obvious performance, per se, although it is, but they make sense in this context because this research is interested in the identity-making that takes place through the social relations in the storytelling space. At the same time, it is important to note that story-as-text carries with it a particular canonical power that contributes to the positioning and valuing of certain identities over others. There is an ideological morality embedded in the stories of the storyteller which positions her audience as certain kinds of people (Wortham, 2000). While her elder status places the storyteller in a unique cultural position to educate the young (Daniel & Effinger, 1996), students in our study at times resisted that relationship and performed identities in conflict with those represented in the stories. Moreover, the students' reshape and renegotiate their identities through their retellings of the stories (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) and these performances of the self *through story* highlight the significance of the storytelling performance as well.

Methodology

Setting for the Study

The setting for this study was an urban elementary school in a large metropolitan district in the Midwest. The school houses students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade, but all students in the study were 3rd graders. During the previous school year, the school had been declared a "fresh start school" which for this school meant that only five staff from the previous year had been retained, including one of the teachers who assigned students to our project. The student population is predominantly African American (75%) with 95% of the students

qualifying for free and reduced lunch. According to the teachers with whom we worked, there is ongoing professional development at the school for its teachers and multiple programs during the day for its students. In fact, we faced several entry issues given what the principal referred to as a "bombardment" of programs and were moved from room to room as space was limited, and therefore protected by staff. Vusi referred to the mentality of the school as a "fortress" because teachers and administrators had rightly been taught to protect themselves from outside scrutiny.

At the time for selecting students, Nothando informed the three participating teachers that she liked to work with struggling readers, but the final selection criteria was left up to individual teachers, and we had no way of actually knowing students' reading skills outside what teachers were willing to share. Seven students participated in the storytelling sessions, and four of them agreed to be part of our study. There were four boys and three girls in the group. Of the focal students, two were boys and two girls. Nothando is an African American woman in her sixties who has been doing this work for over 30 years. On two occasions, another storyteller, Mrs. Brown, substituted for Nothando while she was out of town. She, too, agreed to be part of the study and data for one of her sessions is analyzed below.

Each storytelling sessions would begin with Nothando asking the students about their weekends or checking in with them in some other way. Sometimes, this would take up almost half of the time. From there, Nothando would tell the students a story based, most often, from a picture book that she would have with her but would not share with students until after telling her version of the story because she wanted the pictures to be "in their minds." Additionally, the idea that stories belonged to no one, but could be retold over and over was something that Nothando shared with the students multiple times. As she told the stories, Nothando was always very animated in voice and movement. Students tended to be fully engaged in the stories and

would respond where appropriate to repeat a line, sing a song, or perform movements along with Nothando.

The stories included *Zomo the Rabbit*, *Abiyoyo the Giant*, *The Little Red Hen*, *Ma Bella the Clever*, among others. Typically, the stories were "trickster" tales where the lead protagonist was able to get out of a difficult situation by outwitting the story's villain. Students also acted out *The Little Red Hen* while Nothando narrated, on more than one occasion, and each student retold at least once, some twice, stories of their choosing. On such occasions, Nothando would coach the students with techniques within the genre of storytelling from voice intonation to gestures and movement.

Data Collection and Analysis

We used qualitative research methods to gather the data which consists of audio-recorded storytelling sessions twice weekly, three video-recorded sessions, observational field notes from two research assistants, and individual interviews with four focal students, one teacher, and the storyteller. In order to analyze the data for the study, I transcribed interviews, key events in the storytelling sessions, and observational notes from both storytelling sessions and process meetings with the researchers, grant providers, and storytellers. The analytic methods included thematic coding of the data and critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) with particular attention paid to how social relations, identities, and knowledge are constructed through the storytelling sessions. Throughout the analysis, I was especially interested in repeated performances of the self (Lewis, 2001) which would make clear *who* the speakers are and *what* they are doing in order to get "recognized" as certain kinds of people in a specific time and place (Gee, 2008). Moreover, I focused the analysis on moments where speakers would "decontextualize" stories and "recontextualize" them as acts of control in relations of social power (Bauman & Briggs,

1990). Both Bauman and Briggs and Gee highlight the importance of social power and the exchange of social goods as embedded in Discourse, and the ways in which students accommodated or resisted social power was of particular concern.

In the sections that follow, I analyze three students' performances of the self within the storytelling context. Cortney and Serena both perform "successful" identities in the storytelling space, albeit differently, while Marcus performs a resistant identity at almost every turn, or so it seems. The analysis in this last section suggests that because Marcus's performances of self were in conflict with other "appropriate" social identities, his negotiations of self were not legitimatized. In the discussion, I consider why certain performances were given what Bauman and Briggs (1990) identify as access, legitimacy, competence, and value while others were not.

Findings

"I Could Just Tell a Story": Cortney

The first time Nothando asked participants in the storytelling to choose a tale that she had told and to retell it Cortney was the first to volunteer. This was no surprise since Cortney was always ready to participate in the actions, movements, and responses to the stories that Nothando would tell. In fact, there was a great deal of 'call and response' in Nothando's stories and she described them as developed and storied through the audience participation. On this particular day when Nothando asked students to be storytellers, she reminded them that storytelling was not about getting the story right, but about "making it your own." Cortney chose to tell the tale of *Zomo the Rabbit*, a story that Nothando had told on the very first day weeks earlier. For Cortney, this first retelling was very much about remembering the details, despite Nothando's advice. She looked to her peers for cues and stared up the ceiling, hands behind her back, in search for the

right words. The story she told was an attempt at a very literal reproduction of Nothando's telling with details in tact. Here's an excerpt from the first story:

> Cortney's First Story:
> *Once there was a Rabbit named Zomo. He went to the god and he said can you make me brave? He said, "I can't make you brave yet. You gonna have to do everything I ever tell you. First, you gotta get a cup of milk and some fish gills and a leopard tooth. So that's how you gonna get brave." So he went to go get the fish but then he saw a big fish and so he started beating his drum. So he started beating his drum faster and faster (she beats the drum) and a little a faster so the fish come out and started dancing. Then he started dancing more and he looked down to see his scales fall off and he jumped back in the water. So he picked him up and put him in the drum. Then he went to go get the leopard tooth. I think he went to go get the cup of milk. He went to get the cup of milk. He was climbing a big ole' tree to see a leopard (another student corrects her saying "cow"). Yeah cow. Then he said, "Hey, hey you down there." And she looked around and said, "Who said that?" "I'm up here. Big- (the same student fills in "fat"). Big fat cow."*

During that same session, Nothando asked if Cortney would retell the story of Zomo one more time, but this time Nothando's instructions were to "take a deep breath, take your hands out of your pockets, and think of us as friends who hang out all the time together," and as she said this she made two other students move in closer. "Now, tell us about Zomo the Rabbit," she said, "because we're your friends and we hang out together."

This time, Cortney looked right at her audience and gestured throughout the story to indicate its movements. In addition, Cortney spoke the characters parts in voices something she did not do the first time. Here is her second version:

> Cortney's second story:
> *Once there was a rabbit named Zomo. So he went up to go see the spirit god. He said, "Spirit god, when am I gonna get brave?" He said, "When you bring me everything I'm gonna tell you. First, you need fish gills, and some milk and a leopard tooth." "That's how I'm gonna be brave for doing that?" He said, "Yes." So he walked and kept on walking to a big lake. He took his drum off his back (she gestures this) and put in on the floor. He started beating his drum till the fish started dancing in the water. He kept on beating and beating and he got dancing so he beat his drum faster and faster and faster and faster (she gestures all of this). The fish jump out of the water and started dancing faster and faster so next thing you know you see her gills fall off so she jumps right back in the water and swims*

away (she gestures this). So he put the leopard, he put his drum over and he put his leopard in the drum and puts his drum on his back and he started hopping to a big tree (gestures all of this). So he saw a big tree and he looked up (she does this) he started climbing up (gestures this) the tree and he looked out like (she looks around) and he saw, "Hey you!" (She uses a different voice for this) She looked around and said, "I'm up here!" He said, "You not tough enough for me." She started to get mad and she started to keep up her leg, put her head down and started running. She hit the tree and her horns hit the tree (gesture all of this). She said, "It's stuck." So he climbed down the tree and set down, got his drum own and pulled down on the milk (she milks in the air) and put it in his drum. The milk started gong in his drum. So he left the cow there in the tree and walked away-hopping.

Cortney's second performance of the Zomo story is far more successful than the first. In this telling, the presence of gestures, voices, and extended details carried the story and engaged Cortney's audience beyond the words she was speaking. Although she misspeaks in this version (leopard instead of gills), the student who corrected her before declines to do so this time. Cortney, too, engaged in her telling, moves through this version without a halt. She described her process of telling this story as "just pretend like your a rabbit" and later she explained when she first heard the Zomo story, "I just seen that picture like a snap."

Although Cortney's storytelling techniques are important in this regard, what interests me as well is the social nature of her appropriation of storytelling. According to Gee (2005), people involved in an activity enact identities that they view as consequential in that space. Nothando repeats frequently that she wants the students to feel that they can tell a story, and when she does so, she places her words into first person stating: "I can tell a story. I can TELL a story." The act of retelling, then, takes a prominent place in the storytelling sessions and Cortney, more than any other participant, begins to hone her craft. She embraces all invitations to tell stories throughout the semester, but she passes on writing out her story at one point because "It's in my head." At the same time, although she struggles in reading and writing according to her teacher, Cortney is willing to read a story that Serena brings to the group when Serena proves too shy. In this way,

Cortney's storytelling identity compensates for another literate way of being through reading and writing.

At the same time, storytelling for Cortney is 'shot through,' to use Bakhtin's words, with those other literate ways of being. In the following example, Cortney retells a story for the group. Unlike other stories told in the sessions, this one is the only story that is not a retelling of one the group has already heard Nothando read or tell before. In fact, the story is one that Cortney recontextualizes from a silent reading book in her classroom.

> *Once, a long time ago, it was a giant and a girl. A girl told a joke to a giant. A giant kept on laughing until he blew the trees off leaves. He laughed some more, he laughed so hard he blew the waves up to a island. And until he blew the waves to a big giant, like a big giant ( ), he –* next page *– he blew so hard he blew the stars around the sky until he blew himself into the moon.* And next page. *There he is. You could see him in the moon. He was still laughing at the moon until he sings the ABCs and he was still laughing.*

Twice in the telling of this story, Cortney makes reference to "turning the page," although she does not hold the book in or hands or even pretend to hold the book. In fact, her telling of this story was much like her telling of the first story above, with minimal gestures and a concerted effort to remember the story in order to "get it right." There are markers here of Cortney's socialization into important "school-based" literacies (Gee, 2008) as she merges the genres of story book reading and the less-school based, storytelling. When Nothando asked Cortney why she talked about the pages in her storytelling, Cortney replied, "I like to do that. Cause it's like I just write a book in my mind."

There is a merging here of certain sign systems and forms of knowledge that are consequential to Cortney's literate ways of being in school. First, Nothando privileges a certain kind of telling through gestures and voice intonation that Cortney takes up. She wants to please, something that Nothando notes in our interview: "Cortney reminds me of me somewhat… she

likes praise from her teacher. She likes to be kind of the teacher's pet…I wanna answer the question, I wanna be the one that goes first, I know how to do it, that type of thing." This reading of Cortney in the storytelling space is confirmed by field notes and audio and video recordings. Cortney was always the first to go and sought praise from Nothando by answering other students for her, "Yes you may." At one point, Nothando shared a particular praise with Cortney telling her her, "Tell your mother you are a good storyteller." At the same time, Cortney orchestrates a dominant literary Discourse into her performance of self as well. Nothando has, in many ways, set Cortney up for this merging of oral and school-based literary practices through her retelling of picture books, but Cortney binds one to the other in "turning the page" as she tells her story. Through this recontextualization, she makes print text relevant to her oral telling. For Cortney, the two are not in conflict but instead complement her literate identity. In fact, Cortney explains in our interview that what she'll take away from the storytelling is this: "Mostly thing I liked learning in the storytelling was like when I grow up I could just tell a story to little kids for they could tell the story and the other kids tell the story."

"I Do All the Things Already": *Serena*

Each of the stories that Nothando shared with the students carried in them a particular lesson or moral. Although she selected her stories, she explained in the interview, for their tellability (Och & Capps, 2001) and the "goodness" of the story, Nothando would often end the storytelling sessions by asking students what they had learned. As evident above in the story of *Zomo the Rabbit*, the morals tended to be about gaining wisdom, being brave, demonstrating kindness or honesty, or in the case of the following example, listening to a caring elder. Students often had very little trouble naming the lesson they were to learn, although some took the lessons

somewhat literally, such as Cortney suggesting that the lesson to be learned from *Zomo the Rabbit* was to run from a leopard.

In this section, I explore how morality became a prominent element of the performance of the self for Serena. From the very start, Serena presented herself as a nice girl who listened to directions. In fact, her teacher, Mrs. Johnson, said she included Serena because, while very kind and good, she wanted her to come out of her shell a bit and to find her voice. Serena always waited to be called on, patiently raising her hand in an often otherwise chaotic group of third graders. During a session where Nothando was away and a guest storyteller facilitated the group, Serena was held up as an example of how to act and speak: "Everyone look at Serena. She hasn't moved since we came in here. I know you can all do the same." Furthermore, Serena was selected consistently as the main character of *The Little Red Hen* whenever students would reenact it, and both storytellers would gain the attention of the group saying, "Let's all listen to Serena," when the time came for her to share the "correct" moral of the story.

Repeated performances of the self always take place in relation to the group and the social goods at stake therein. While Cortney embodied the storyteller in order to be recognized as a certain kind of person, Serena utilized the Discourse of the moral person in order to be recognized herself. She, too, embodied this Discourse in sitting still, raising her hand, looking at the speaker, and speaking softly so that the adult in charge would call on others to hear her voice, marking it important and worthy of being heard.

Serena also demonstrated the significance of morality in the retelling of Nothando's tales. The story and retelling of *Ma Bella the Clever* is one example. Instead of including the entire transcribed text, here are some important highlights of Nothando's telling.

Ma Bella is a mouse whose papa offers her advice. He tells her, “When you are out and about, keep your ears open. When you are out and about, keep your eyes open and look around you. When you are speaking, listen to what you are saying. And if you need to move, move fast.” As usual in her tales, Nothando offers the moral melodically, slowly, and with careful eye contact with her audience. Ma Bella, she tells the group, got to be clever “because her papa was always giving her advice.”

After receiving such advice, Ma Bella comes upon a cat who convinces all of the young mice to dance and sing with her in a line. As they do so, the cat puts the mice one by one into a sack during a particularly loud part of the song. Heeding her papa’s advice, Ma Bella starts to listen and look around. Speaking the sequence of events to herself, she realizes what is happening, and of course, moves fast to get away from the cat. Nothando ends the story this way: “Ma Bella, when she becomes a parent, gives the same advice to her mice children, so that they can be clever little mice. You too will be clever children if you follow the advice of caring adults – those folks who tell you things that help keep you safe, healthy, and happy. And that is the story of Ma Bella the clever.”

As usual, Nothando asked the third graders what they had learned from the story. Their responses follow:

Marcus:	Kidnapping. Watch out for kidnappers.
Nothando:	What else?
Cortney:	Never come outside when it’s dark.
Nothando:	Serena, what about you?
Serena:	I do all the things already.
Nothando:	You obviously have a caring adult like papa mouse. Please share what they tell you.
Serena:	They tell me not to go with nobody and they tell me…
Marcus:	Not go in people’s house I don’t know.
Cortney:	Don’t open the door for strangers.

Interestingly, Serana cannot say that she learned this lesson from the story because, in her words, "I do all the things already." The notion that one is to learn lessons from stories positions hearers of the tale as somehow without the lesson he or she is to learn. In Serena's case, she repositions herself in relation to the story and to the group as one already in possession of such values. While other students appropriate the moral as one about kidnappers and strangers in the dark, Serena explains that she already knows to never go with someone. Although the shifts in their language are subtle, kidnappers and strangers in the dark have a fantastical nature that Serena's "don't go with nobody" does not. She does not repeat the narrative of the children fearing strangers that many folktales perpetuate, but instead brings the moral back to the *who* she performs in that space and performs an identity through the knowledge she brings forth (Holland et al., 1998).

In what follows, Serena retells the story of *Ma Bella the Clever*, and while she wasn't the first to do so, she stories herself into the tale which could aptly be titled, *Serena the Clever*. Notably, Cortney was the only other student who storied herself into a tale, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, but unlike Serena, she does not recontextualize the story in quite the same way. Serena's story follows:

> *Once upon a time there was a girl named Serena. And she went outside and she saw this tall man. And he told her to meet him in the front of the restaurant and she did. And then when she got there it was a tall man and it was a car. And then he told her to get in but she didn't listen. She went inside the restaurant and she sat with these… she… can I start over."*
>
> *"Serena went outside and she saw a tall man and he told her to meet him in front of the restaurant and the same restaurant he told her to meet her at her parents were there. And then car was in the front and he told her to get in. And she ran to the restaurant and then she sat at the chair and then her parents was at the table she sat at. And then they said, "Serena, what are you doing here?" And then she said, said, "This man told me to come here." And she went outside and she showed her parents the man. And then they called the police and the police took the man to jail and then Serena's parents told her, "What did I tell you about going with*

strangers?" And she said, "But…" and they said, "No buts." And then (long pause) then end."

In Serena's retelling of this tale, she does two significant things. First, instead of "making the story her own" through shifts in the plot or additional details, she recontextualizes the moral of the tale, that children should always listen to their parents, into her own story. I include, above, the restarting of her story as well because her it indicates a particular dilemma in her first version, that parents are absent and the character Serena is in danger of sitting down with strangers in the restaurant. Such a telling of the story would go against the moral she wishes to purvey. In the restart, then, the parents are present in the story which opens the possibility of reading another moral lesson through the tale: children should avoid strangers.

Significantly, as noted above, Serena stories herself into the tale by making herself its protagonist. Bauman and Briggs (1990) write that "to decontenxualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control" (p. 76). Although Serena's performance as a moral person is not contested in this space, in fact it is rewarded in many ways, this recontextualization of the moral subtext makes relevant a particular way of knowing in this space (Gee, 2005) which privileges obedience to adults and social Discourses of "being good." In this move of "storying" herself into the tale, Serena stabilizes a moral identity for herself and asserts that she does "do all the [right] things already." In this case, what Gee describes as a primary Discourse of home, where Serena learns to do the right things, seemed at first to be in conflict with the secondary Discourse of storytelling at school where she was to learn important lessons. Yet, by recontextualizing the moral into a story about herself, Serena orchestrates the primary and secondary Discourses into this story and literally performs herself through it.

“I wasn’t being greedy. I’m nice”: Marcus

If Cortney and Serena both performed legitimate identities as the storyteller and the moral beacon, then Marcus stands in contradiction as one who, according to Nothando, couldn’t find his story. From the very start of the project, Marcus took up space. Not only was he the largest of the third graders in our group, but he was also the most vocal, the most active, and the one in the most constant need of Nothando’s attention – particularly to correct behavior. Speaking about Marcus in a closing interview, Nothando said:

> I haven't found the key to um little Mr. Marcus yet and that would really, you know, I would think that would be just a real boon if I could get to him. I haven't gotten to him yet. He is still on the outskirts. He's not listening yet . . . If I can find the story for him that makes him sit up and think about him and his actions, then I will have done a yeoman job. I'm steady looking for that story for him. I know there's one for him that will touch him, you know. But I haven't been able to find it yet.
>
> Yes, I believe there's a story that fits each of them, but there's some that I feel *need* that story. I think he needs that story. I think things are handed to him so easily that he doesn't have regard for most things. And um, that he kinda gets away with a bit. And so he doesn't understand or he hasn't gotten into a situation where he really had to deal with the consequences
>
> So I want a story that speaks to that that will – with some little animals or something – that will help him to understand you can go too far. You know so that maybe at some point he might think "oh, maybe I need to back on off of this." You know. But I'm lookin', I'm lookin', I'm lookin' for him. Save him from himself.

Nothando’s notion that a story could save Marcus is powerful and it points to her purpose for her interactions with Marcus throughout the storytelling sessions. For example, each student was asked to retell a story as Cortney and Serena do in their sections above. Nothando allowed Cortney and Serena to both finish their stories before giving them feedback, and then, the feedback to Cortney, for example, was about retelling the story while thinking about the room filled with her friends, while Serena received little feedback, if any. With Marcus, however,

Nothando gave very specific directives such as, “stand up,” “turn around and look at them as they speak,” “start over,” and “stand up straight.” Arguably, each of these directives relates to appropriate modes within the genre of storytelling, yet at the same time, it is important that Nothando’s directives to Marcus regulate the use of his body. Although she made general statements about the use of gesture and voice with the whole group, she often referenced these while asking students what they noticed about how she had told a story. Here, she is specific about how Marcus should use his body in space and *disciplines* his actions (Foucault, 1977). All of this, I would argue, harkens back to Nothando’s steady wish to “save Marcus from himself” as she views his performance of self as one that places him in jeopardy within social institutions that view the young black man as a threat. At the same time, such moves position Marcus as a problem to be corrected, and he responds in turn to this positional identity through both appropriation of it (allowing himself to be corrected) and resistance to it (returning daily to perform the self in need of correction) (Conquergood, 1989).

Holland et al. (1998) describe such positional identities in the following way: “Positional identity, as we use the term, is a person’s apprehension of her social position in a lived world: that is, depending on the others present, of her greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and, through those genres, authoritative voices, or any voice at all” (p. 128). Like Cortney and Serena, Marcus’s access to the genre of storytelling is mediated by the others present as he attempts to take on this role, but unlike the two girls, his access to the genre of storytelling remains tentative and regulated. While Nothando seeks a story for Marcus, he too, searches for an authoritative voice (Bakhtin, 1981). Yet, because his way of authoring a self is in opposition to those that Nothando and the other students deem competent and legitimate, he “learns” the social identity of the “deviant” (Wortham, 2006).

I move now to a more specific example of Marcus's negotiation of identity in response to a story. On this particular day, Mrs. Brown tells a Nigerian tale. In this story two friends, Baku and Bakee, travel to a faraway village where the people are rich and kind. The villagers welcome the guests and give them a place to stay. When the king calls them into the castle, Bakee tells Baku that from now on he will do all of the talking. Additionally, when food comes the next morning, Bakee tells Baku that the food is for him alone and he eats it all himself. While Bakee enjoys the kindness of the villagers, Baku joins them to work in the fields. When it's time to leave, the villagers want to give gifts to the guests. Bakee assumes the gifts are for him, but the king explains that Bakee has been greedy and the gifts are all for Baku, the kind one.

Before starting this story, Mrs. Brown decides that Marcus and another boy will represent the characters of Baku and Bakee. She makes Marcus Bakee and another boy, Baku. While telling the story, she points to the boys, speaks directly to them as its narrator, and notes to the group how their expressions match those of the characters in the story. At the end of the story when the gifts are given to Baku, Mrs. Brown gives actual gifts to the boy who represents him: an African drum, bowl, and rug. As this happens, the following takes place:

Marcus:	I'm Bako (as she hands the African drum to another boy). I'm Bakee?
Mrs. B:	Exactly (continuing the story and handing the gifts to the other boy)
Mrs. B:	And Bakee kept looking just like Marcus did. Did you see him?
Marcus:	(after she hands out the rug) "Hey, I want to be Baku. I want to be Bako."
Mrs. B:	(to Marcus as Bakee) You have done nothing but sit in the room. You have not asked the women if they need any help. And we have noticed that you have gotten chunkier.
Marcus:	Huh? (mouth agape)
Mrs. B:	And we know you have had no food to share with Bako. We are a village of kindness, but not a village of stupidity. And Baku said to Bakee: You chose the name Bakee because you wanted to be so greedy. It didn't pay off I am not as mean and thoughtless as you are.
Marcus:	Does he get to have this? Can I have it?

Here, there is a delicate balance between what is to be taken literally and what is to remain in the realm of story. When I asked Mrs. Brown why she thought to make Marcus the character of Bakee, she explained that she could tell, even having just met him, that he could use the lesson of the story – to not be greedy. Thus, when she looks directly at Marcus as Bakee and tells him that he has been greedy and has gotten chunky, Marcus performs the appropriate response for Bakee, (Huh?), but he does it as Marcus. In addition, because she hands out the tangible gifts to another boy, Marcus rightfully wants to switch characters and wonders, Can I have anything? He does not want to associate himself with the greedy character of Bakee, but as he resists this, he merely demonstrates and reifies himself as having the character of Bakee. His attempts to escape such recognition are circumscribed by the structures of the story and he reinforces his identification as the greedy Bakee. Thus, when he asks, "I'm Bakee?" we can read Mrs. Brown's response of "exactly" as heteroglossic. She not only affirms that Marcus is the character of Bakee, but also that he *is* Bakee in character.

When Nothando returned the following session, she asked students to recount the story of Baku and Bakee. Marcus was excited to share the tale and retold the story this way:

> I was Bakee. Bakee didn't do, Bakee, Bakee did play with the kids or something. And Bakee he was a greedy cause he said I want to be the speaker. And then after that cause he didn't help none of the kids he said I'm a go in my room and sit down. And lay down. And he said he wanted to be the speaker. And after that the end of the story she gave Bako like a basket and like a mat. And um that's it.

Here, Marcus starts by naming himself as the character of Bakee, but as he retells the details of the story he associates that negative characteristic of greediness not as his own, but as Bakee's. Additionally, at the end, he notes that the gifts were given to Bako (Baku), not to the other boy as they were literally given. Yet, as Nothando probes other students to add their details to the story, students refer to Marcus *as* Bakee and the other boy as Baku. As students begin to associate

greediness with Marcus, he responds vehemently against this stating, “No I wasn’t. I wasn’t being greedy. No I wasn’t!” and then under his breath, “No I wasn’t. I wasn’t being greedy. I’m nice.” His pleas, sadly, are all but ignored, and he is not able to commandeer an authoritative voice, or any voice at all, in this particular positioning. The meanings, in this way, become stabilized and reified (Barton & Hamilton, 2005) even as Marcus pushes against them.

When I interviewed Marcus about this story, he told me that he was Bakee, and went on to say, “I used to be mean. I used to be greedy.” Here, he uses *I* and makes himself Bakee at moments explaining that he *used* to be mean and *used* to be greedy. There is no suggestion in the story itself that Bakee changes, but here, Marcus, giving in to the identification as Bakee, also transforms the story into one where his character changes. Although subtle, this is an important recontextualization because it allows Marcus an element of agency in this retelling of the story as he inserts his own intention (Bakhtin, 1981) and responds to the authoritative voices through his own internally persuasive one. In this way, he renegotiates and “restories” his identity in relation to this tale.

Discussion

In this section, I bring together elements of all cases above to better understand what made certain kinds of performances of the self legitimate in this storytelling space and what made others illegitimate. In order to do this, I turn to Bauman and Briggs’(1990) work on “contextualization and recontextualization.” Contextualization, first of all, is the idea that texts emerge within the context of social negotiation between participants. This is an ongoing process whereby individuals attend to “contextualization cues” that signal features of the interactions to which participants are to attend (p. 68). This process is active and requires that “participants reflexively examine the discourse as it is emerging, embedding assessments of its structure and

significance in the speech itself" (p. 69). Thus, how students are to interpret Nothando's and Mrs. Brown's stories depends on the co-construction of the context among participants, where both local interactions and broader social Discourses of school and community come into play. Each student attends to interactions within the local space as well as within their families and school communities which position them as "the good storyteller," "the moral person," or "the deviant."

Recontextualization, then, is the process by which texts are decontextualized from one social context and are embedded in another. Bauman and Briggs argue that because performances "license" (p. 73) the audience to evaluate them, they are always prone to a transformation through decontextualization, although the ease of such a process varies depending on how anchored Discourse is to other processes within the context. Marcus, for example, once he had been contextualized as having Bakee's greedy characteristics, struggled to decontextualize such identification and to recontextualize himself as "nice." Only in the interview, then, was he able to transform the text by also accepting its initial structure. Cortney and Serena recontextualize elements as well. Cortney by appropriating Discourses of school-based literacies within the oral tradition and Serena by decontextualizing Ma Bella's moral and recontextualizing it into one with herself as protagonist. Such recontextualizations are acts of social control despite the boundaries that remain. de Certeau (1984) refers to such tactical opportunities as "seized on the wing," but suggests that they are agentic nonetheless.

Although the processes of recontextualization for social control are evident in each of the cases above, questions remain as to whether certain forms of them were embraced as "successful" or legitimate while others were not. Bauman and Briggs write that "decontextualization and recontextualization of performed discourse bear upon the political

economy of texts," and that "in regard to the differential exercise of social control the issue of social power arises" (p. 76). In other words, exercises of social control through the process of recontextualization never take place outside the affordances of socially constructed power relations and ideologies. Bauman and Briggs identify four elements of the differentiation of social control as *access*, *legitimacy*, *competence*, and *values*.

Access depends on the institutional structures, definitions of eligibility, and other methods of inclusion and exclusion (p. 76). Both Serena and Cortney both had access to the support of the storytelling community, although in different ways. Cortney was able to negotiate written and oral literacies because she was a strong storyteller who reminded Nothando of herself. Serena, on the other hand, had ready access to the morality that was valued in this space. Marcus's access, however, was limited by structures that did not value his interruptions and movements. It is important to note, however, that Marcus was never kept from participating in the storytelling sessions.

Legitimacy has to do with being given the authority to appropriate and control texts (p. 76-78). Not only does this refer to legal structures that limit such authority, but also to the social mechanisms that do the same. Nothando honored a certain amount of decontextualization and recontextualization of text by asserting that retellings always remade the story anew. Yet at the same time, interactional cues limited Marcus's ability to reappropriate stories in ways that afforded him control over his own self-making. Instead, he was storied into tales without ever being able to story himself in ways that the community legitimized.

Competence refers to the ability to decontextualize and recontextualize successfully and appropriately. In ways described above, all three students were able to negotiate this process, but with varying degrees of what had been contextualized in the first place as successful and

appropriate. Because he lacked competence as a storyteller in ways that Serena and Cortney had mastered, only in the context of the interview, where the structure afforded different cues, did his attempt to recontextualize and create himself as "nice" go unchallenged.

Finally, values organize the status and uses of texts into a hierarchy of preference (p. 77). Again, Cortney and Serena's performances of text and self were most highly valued by Nothando. First and foremost, stories were to be remade and performed skillfully with audience in mind. Cortney, more than any other student, began to embody the storyteller and to perform successfully within the genre through gestures, repetition, and intonation. Serena's appropriation of text into the telling of her own moral self was organized into a valued position as well through repeated focus on her "goodness." Marcus, too, I would argue, was valued as an important member of the community because through his constant pushing against it, the boundaries of acceptable ways of being became clearer to the others. At the same time, his uses of and embodiment of text received steady correction as well, reminding him of the limits of his authority.

Conclusion

Although performance theory and elements of Gee's building tasks from critical discourse analysis bring to light the ways in which identities are negotiated, reified, and resisted in the storytelling space, questions remain as I conclude this paper. Further analysis might consider how gender intersects with the differential access, legitimacy, competence, and value afforded certain texts. In addition, studies in folklore might offer a better understanding of how the stories themselves create entry points and closures for particular students, as well as a more nuanced analysis of performance as it relates to particular genres of text. Finally, due to the limitations of space and time, this papers neglects to reflect upon the role that my own identity

negotiations as a white researcher play, although there were many hints that such a positioning was influential.

I return, finally, to the purpose of this research in my conclusion. One goal was to support Nothando and Vusi in understanding how her stories build a storytelling family, develop community allegiance, and offer possible futures to the students who hear them. What becomes evident in considering these elements is that the goals themselves are in constant negotiation just as, and along with, the identities and ways of being. The process of co-constructing space, meaning, identity, agency, and authority was ongoing throughout the sessions amid the differential social codes of power. Thus, it is possible to conclude that what Nothando set out to do was both successful in the sense that she afforded multiple ways of being in her storytelling sessions, and unsuccessful in the sense that it also closed others out. Such is the contextualization of any space. At the same time, it is important to recall that Nothando was “steady looking for a story” for Marcus and knew that she had not found it yet. It is difficult for me to speculate on what that “right” story might be, but I would contend that it would afford him the opportunity to decontextualize and recontextualize in powerful and agentic ways.

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